

## THE ROMANIAN CONSUMER AND HIS/HER RIGHTS: OPINIONS AND ATTITUDES

Florica Ștefănescu<sup>1\*</sup> and Sergiu Bălțătescu<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1) 2)</sup> *University of Oradea, Romania*

---

### Abstract

An important component of the quality of life, the consumers' rights and interests protection has become a priority of the European Union policy, a type of policy based among others on the results of the Eurobarometer type studies. Our study is a secondary analysis of the data provided by the special EB 69.1 Eurobarometer on the topic of „Consumer Protection on the Domestic Market” (European Commission, 2008). We focused on aspects connected to the Romanian consumer: the ascribed factors which influence the purchasing decision related to gender, age, level of education, residence, the level of protection felt by the consumer, ways of consumers' protection as they are seen by the consumers themselves, the mechanism of safety product assessment done by the consumers. From the data analysis in the present study we concluded that numerous Romanian consumers do not know the laws and the institutions entitled to protect their rights, but are discontent regarding the manner their rights are observed; they have as a main purchasing criterion the price; the producers take advantage of the lack of information and attitude of the consumers regarding their rights; and the consumers, lacking a suitable education, remain only at the level of discontent, of not trusting the possibility of their rights being respected, which in its turn causes a low level of self-protection. In these conditions we consider necessary the systematic education of the consumers as well as producers regarding the quality, the safety of the marketed products, of the attitude regarding the disobedience of the producers/suppliers for the regulations in this area, doubled by an increased interest from the authorities for consumer protection and a manifestation of individual or associative civic sense.

**Keywords:** the Romanian consumer, rights, attitudes, protection methods, safety

**JEL classification:** A14, D18

---

### Introduction

At the beginning of the 3rd millennium the Romanian consumer is faced with an increasingly diversified and plentiful offer, but he/she also has enhanced demands

---

\* Corresponding author, **Florica Ștefănescu** - florica.stefanescu@gmail.com

regarding the goods and services that he/she buys. As a consequence, one can expect that he/she be familiar with his/her rights and to demand that they be respected by their partners in this exchange – the producers and the sellers. As a principle, „the goods and the services should have, in the case of usual employment or used within reasonable conditions predictable for specialists, the safety that the consumers can lawfully expect and which would not infringe upon their health” (Mierlea et. al., 2006). That things are nonetheless different is proven by the behaviour of the two groups, mostly founded on power-driven relations.

Apparently it is about the power exercised by the consumers, the ones who express their needs through demand, whom, in the context of free market competition and an abundance of products and services, can choose according to their own interests what and how much to buy. Ultimately the consumers would seem to be the ones who dictate the volume and the structure of the marketed goods.

Actually, the reality is different. The producers are in control of the power granted by the information regarding the goods they offer for sale, information that is often unknown or less known by the consumers, to which one can add the power given by the marketing means that the first practice so that they can increase the sales’ volume within the context of an increasingly harsh competition on the market (Joule & Beauvois, 1997). Besides that, the fact that between the producer and the consumer often comes the seller increases the pressure over the consumer, the seller following its own interests too.

In the context of the growth of the complexity regarding international commercial relations, of globalization and the freedom of the commerce, the privatization of public utilities companies, of the deregulation and enhancement of competition, the emergence and the development of electronic commerce, one can talk about new dimensions of consumer protection; when the buyers do not come into direct contact neither with the seller, nor with the products they buy (Winn, 2006). These new conditions have an even greater impact in the developing countries or countries in transition (Filip & Simionescu, 2004). Likewise, the new selling methods which should support the consumer – selling products at somebody’s home, working place, through the internet, by phone calls – accompanied by specific methods, reduce to some extent the consumer’s possibility of decision and choice.

The interest of the two categories rarely overlap and if so only partially. Responsible producers, whose proportion varies from one country to another, have the same interests with the demanding consumers who are active regarding their rights; both sides struggling for a fine quality and the right price. The great number of such consumers can marginalize the producers who get a hold of the market by low prices and low quality products.

Thus the producers aim for profit growth, often made through reducing costs and therefore product quality, while the consumers aim to cover the largest possible volume of needs with safe and fine quality products and services while having a fixed income or going for lower prices. In other words, they have divergent interests sometimes impossible to meet. In this situation it would be unrealistic to talk about a „partnership” between producers and consumers, or even about a potential solidarity, be it only because at one time or another both categories become consumers. Maybe we could accept the idea of an approaching between their attitudes and opinions by agreeing, on both sides, on some quality standards and on assuming responsibility; but this would be possible only under the circumstances of

educating the consumers, producers and sellers, which in turn would generate a desirable behaviour and ethical civic attitude.

Thus one needs a judge. This judge is the state through the laws that it gives and through the institutions entitled to watch over the encouragement and observance of the required legislation. However, the state has frequently proven itself to be incapable of facing the marketing methods that have become more and more subtle – almost to the limit of manipulation, as well as in front of the law trespassing regarding the quality and the safety of the products and services to be sold. Moreover, the state has greater direct interests regarding the producers and the sellers who are paying taxes and charges, even if, from its very foundation, one of the state's attributions is to protect and defend its citizens.

Under these circumstances, the consumer was forced to defend its interests on its own or through the intermediary of consumers' associations; for this purpose appealing to the improvement of the legislation which would explicitly sanction its rights and the actions to be taken if the law is not obeyed. In this situation one can talk about an educated consumer, who knows its rights and is interested in having them obeyed, willing to react if they are trespassed, and willing to sacrifice a part of its time to solve the emerging problems. But how many consumers can be said to be like that? In our opinion, in Romania they are not enough in order to exercise an efficient pressure that could lead towards a real protection of their own interests. They must be joined by the consumers' associations whose legal status would allow for firmer attitudes; a fact which should have greater impact in the field.

Some of the types of abuse that the producers and the sellers practice on the market are:

- selling out-of-date products;
- selling products of a questionable quality;
- selling dangerous products;
- abusive clauses in the sale contract (non-warranty clauses for hidden flaws, clauses of trader's responsibility declination);
- deceitful publicity;
- selling products with names resembling those of famous brands;
- missing prices and characteristics on the product;
- lack of warnings regarding potential risks for the consumer (OUG nr. 21/1992).

Such forms of abuse should be, first of all, known so that one can take action for their prevention, or if these do occur, the culprits should be punished. The publication of such aspects can significantly contribute to the improvement of the degree to which the consumers' rights and interests are protected.

The markets' evolution and accessibility, the globalization, the abundance of products and services modify not only the relationships between the consumers and the producers/merchants, but also the consumers' habits and attitudes. The education for consumption thus becomes an equally important right like the one for consumers' protection, a fact confirmed among others by the following idea: „the main proposal is [...] promoting constant campaigns for consumers' real information and their education regarding the rights and the obligations they have” (Supplement InfoCons Magazine, Jan.

2008, p.31). Aspects like those connected to consumers' protection have received a tremendous importance in the contemporary world due to the volume and diversity of consumer's needs, due to the increase of its demands regarding the consumption on the one hand, and of the producers' very generous offer on the other; but both of them can be met in a specific form also in traditional societies.

Although according to Glickman (2009), the American Revolution itself can be considered a consumers' movement, the first clear outcomes of this movement in the U.S.A. are connected to the movement directed against the car industry in the 1960s, particularly against General Motors, which, due to lack of safety reasons, was compelled to withdraw from the market a car model. In this process were involved various specialists (legal experts, economists, doctors, engineers) to sustain the consumers' rights. However, several years later, in 1971, the American Consumers' Association – ACA was established, whose main purpose was to protect democracy, public health and the consumer's safety, for which they lobbied in the American Congress.

At the end of the 20th century and the beginning of the 21st, other national and international consumers' associations appear which militate for environmental protection, social justice, anti-globalization protests on the occasion of various international summits. The American consumers and their rights become, starting with the 60s, a subject for numerous laws regarding consumer's protection, viewed as being the „weak side” of a contract.

In Europe, this problem can be found in the Rome treaty which set up the EC (1957) under the form of provisions regarding agriculture and competition. In 1975 the first consumer protection program was adopted which established fundamental rights regarding health's and safety's protection, that of the economic interests, education and information, as well as rights regarding consumers' consultation and representation. Later on, these rights were sanctioned through the Maastricht (1992) and Amsterdam (1999) treaties (Dinu, 2006).

At global level, the U.N. admits and sanctions the consumers' rights through the World Charter of Consumers' Rights (1985), and in 1992 at the Earth Summit from Rio, the 21 Agenda is adopted, which is a set of measures for redirecting development and consumption in the 21st century adopting the principles of durable development (Bourgoin, 2008). Other international organizations like OECD were especially concerned with the theme of consumer's protection, drawing up important policy documents (Ueno et al., 2009). The consumers' problems are represented at the highest level in the European Union, which on January 1st, 2007 gave to Bulgaria, within the Barroso Commission, the portfolio of European Commissary responsible for „Consumer's Protection”.

### **1. Opinions and attitudes of the Romanian consumer regarding the observance of its rights. Secondary analysis**

The objectives of our study have been:

- Identifying the reported factors that influence the buying decision according to gender, age, level of education, residence
- Evaluating the level of protection felt by the consumer

- Identifying the most efficient means of consumers' protection according to their perception of these means
- Finding the mechanism of product safety evaluation by the consumers

### 1.1 Methodology

In order to meet these objectives we realized a secondary analysis based on data provided by the special EB 69.1 Eurobarometer on the issue of „Consumer's Protection on Domestic Market" (European Commission, 2008). The Eurobarometer, carried in the E.U. countries since 1974, is a research having already a tradition. It comprises usually two standard surveys and several special or flash surveys on representative population samples from each member state. The dataset, publicly available, was obtained through ZACAT, the social science data portal of GESIS - Leibniz Institute for the Social Sciences and processed using SPSS statistical analysis software, Version 15.0.0.

Secondary analysis, which is performed on data previously issued (sometimes for other purposes than the present study), is a method often used in social sciences in general and economics in particular. Besides being relatively low cost and less time-consuming, it helps raising the quality of the empirical studies, especially when datasets collected by prestigious institutions and validated by numerous previous tests are used. It also facilitates the reporting of results and collaboration between specialists (Kiecolt & Nathan, 1985).

For Romania, the Eurobarometer 69.1 included a multi-phased stratified sample of 1.024 subjects, representative for the Romanian population aged at least 15. The field research took place between February and March 2008. The socio-demographic distribution of the sample is illustrated in table no. 1.

**Table no. 1: The socio-demographic distribution of EB 69.1 sample for Romania**

		Percents
Gender	Male	48,3
	Female	51,7
Age group	15-24	17,6
	25-39	29,5
	40-54	22,7
	55+	30,2
Education (in number of graduated years)	Up to 15 years	14,3
	16-19 years	48,1
	20 years and over	24,5
	Still studying	12,0
	No education	1,0
Residence	Village	43,6
	Town	24,9
	City	31,6

The following types of questions were analysed:

A. Reported factors which influence the buying decision in the case of non-food products (a question with 3 choices out of 7 possible answers: the brand, the price, the supplier's identity, etc.)

B. The subjective estimate of the degree in which the consumer feels protected (5 items arranged from 1 to 4. Example: *You feel that you are adequately protected by existing measures to protect consumers?*)

C. The assessment of the best ways to protect consumers. 5 choices out of 13 items (Example: *Easy comparison of offers, Clear and transparent pricing*)

D. The assessment of non-food products' safety on the market (simple question).

For the categories of questions A-C, we computed frequencies and contingency tables using multiple response analysis.

By the secondary analysis of Eurobarometer 69.1 survey dataset we sought not only to describe the Romanian consumer opinions and attitudes, but also to explain their sources of variation. The analytical and explanatory nature of this study is enhanced by the use of advanced statistical procedures such as *principal components analysis*, *multiple regression analysis* and *cluster analysis*. None of the results set out below has been presented so far, at least to our knowledge, in Romania or elsewhere.

## 1.2 Results

### A. The factors that influence the non-food products buying decision

The literature (Dubois & Jolibert, 1994, Boier, 1994, Cătoi & Teodorescu, 1997, Hill & O'Sullivan, 1997) underlines multiple factors which motivate the buying decision and which can be grouped in several categories: *economic factors* (the price, the income, predictions regarding the price or income evolution, the price of the replaceable or complementary products), *social factors* (age, family, social group belonging, social stratum, social status), *cultural factors* (education and instruction level, the value system, traditions and customs, religion) and psychological factors (perception, motivation, emotionality, attitudes, behavior). This is a strictly didactic classification because from a functional point of view we can notice such a complex interaction between these factors that often we cannot identify exactly which one can be found behind the buying decision. For example, an educated young person would choose a product considering its brand, but the product's high price and his/her low income would not allow for such a thing to happen. Nonetheless it is very possible that he/she might buy it, sacrificing other purchases, sometimes even more important ones. We can notice here the presence of factors belonging to all the above factors, equally rational and emotional.

In the case regarding the Romanian consumer one can observe in table no. 2 that the criterion of the price is predominant (70.7%). Next are the brand and the safety, each quoted by approximately 50% of the subjects. The other criteria have been less mentioned. Regarding the price, the explanation could be found in the low average income in Romania, as well as predictions regarding their stagnation or small increase growth in the near future. As regarding the brand, it can be attributed to the increase of the education level and that of the Romanian consumer's interest for the quality of the purchased products. Last but not least, regarding safety, the explanation could rely on the fact that in most Romanian

families, the shopping or the shopping decision lies with the women, for whom the safety of the purchased products is important. The ethical aspects do not seem to represent a criterion for choosing some products, the Romanians being rather forced to judge according to pragmatic criteria, especially those regarding the price.

**Table no. 2: The factors which influence the non-food products buying decision (percents calculated from a maximum of 3 choices).**

	Percents
The price	70,7
The brand	54,6
Safety	49,2
The country where the product was made	26,4
The identity of the supplier	23,3
It depends on the product	3,4
Ethical considerations	3,2
TOTAL	230,8

In table no. 3 we have presented the preferences for the price, brand and safety according to the socio-demographic variables: gender, education and residence. Some of the most significant results say that men usually mention the brand as a purchasing criterion more than women do, a fact that could be justified by men's larger incomes which make them chose products in terms of brands. On the other hand, we should keep in mind that this is about non-food products. In the case of food products probably the order would be reversed, the brand being associated with quality and responsibility. Another explanation relies on the higher degree of men's participation in purchasing non-food and long-standing utility goods. At any age, the criterion of the price is the main one for choosing the merchandise. From all the age groups, that of middle-aged adults (25-39 years) accentuates safety the most, whereas the respondents over 55 years old accentuate the price the most. In the case of the first category we can assume that the accent on safety is a consequence of parenthood status of those from this age group, whereas in the case of the second category the explanation for the emphasis laid on the price is connected to a lower income level or maybe even more to the predictions regarding the decrease of the income, come retirement age.

**Table no. 3: Preferences regarding price, brand and safety according to the socio-demographic categories (percents computed from 5 possible choices).**

		Safety	Price	Brand
Gender	Male	49,9	69,5	60,9
	Female	48,5	71,7	48,7
Age group	15-24	48,2	64,4	66,7
	25-39	56,5	65,6	60,4
	40-54	45,1	73,5	54,7
	55+	45,7	77,2	41,8
Education	Up to 15 years	41,0	78,9	36,4
	16-19 years	48,3	72,3	54,7
	20 years and over	53,2	67,9	62,8
	Still studying	54,3	60,5	64,1
	No education	48,2	63,5	

		<b>Safety</b>	<b>Price</b>	<b>Brand</b>
Residence	Village	43,7	70,9	49,9
	Town	51,0	73,2	57,4
	City	55,4	68,3	58,9
	Total	100	100	100

The brand is young people's favourite choice criterion. This fact can be explained by young people's greater degree of information regarding the brands of the products they are interested in, the accent on the symbolic benefits of products, but also by the fact that the concern towards income management is lower at this age, much of it coming from the parents who display a great freedom regarding the children's needs and desires.

The distribution according to residence is the following: from all the residential backgrounds, in small towns and the rural milieu one stresses the criteria connected to the brand or safety the least, while the price has the most important role in choosing non-food products. Countless studies about poverty underline its predominance in the rural background, since the inhabitants' lack of interest for other grounds than the price.

Regardless of the criterion that the consumers declare as being at the core of their purchasing decision, all of them want to get the highest possible value which takes the form of product purchasing satisfaction, a gratification that can be materialized in physical or emotional comfort, in covering ever increasing and various needs and desires.

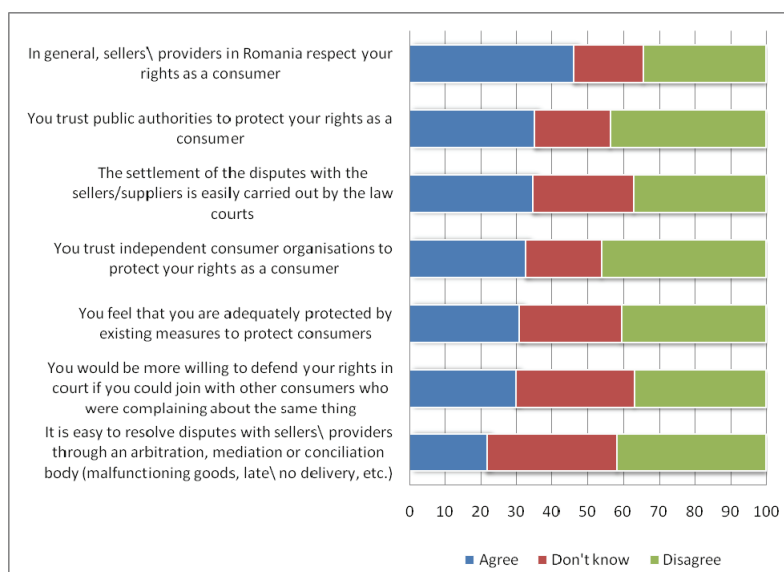
*B. The estimate of the degree in which the consumer feels protected*

The questionnaire is composed of a group of 7 items regarding consumer protection; four of these assess the safety felt by the consumer, generally or varying with the activity of the main players in this field: sellers and suppliers, public authorities and independent consumers' organisations. Another 3 items relate to disputes and their mediation (for example „The settlement of the disputes with the sellers/suppliers is easily carried out by the law courts”).

Knowing the consumers' perception regarding the degree in which they feel protected can prove to be extremely useful for those interested in the consumer's behaviour, from the state to the consumers' organizations, from the institutions authorized to protect the consumers to producers and sellers, as long as this perception can be a decisive factor in relating the consumer to all those above mentioned.

As noticed, the Romanian consumers are rather dissatisfied with their rights' observance by various players involved in solving these problems. The highest degree of trust is related to the observance of their rights by suppliers and sellers (46%). The balance between pro and con opinions is almost even regarding the statement that the disputes with the sellers and suppliers can be easily solved by law courts. As a reverse, the negative opinions relate to the observance of consumers' rights by authorities (44% disagree), consumers' organizations (46% disagree) and the protection offered by the present consumers' protection measures (40% disagree). (Figure no. 1)





**Figure no. 1: The answer percentages to 7 questions regarding consumer protection**

*Note: The „I totally agree” and „I rather agree” as well as „I rather disagree” and „I totally disagree” categories have been merged.*

Surprisingly, the interviewees associate the consumers' organizations with the authorities, expressing evenly their discontent regarding these two involved actors; in this case one knows that in Romania the associative model of the consumer does not exist.

Paradoxically, people consider that their rights are respected in a greater degree by the sellers and suppliers than the organizations meant to protect them against these very producers and sellers. In Romania the marketing strategies insistently aims gaining the trust of potential consumers, including by openly expressing interest for the observance of consumer's rights; a fact which in the case of authorised state agencies happens rarely and less convincingly, thus making the consumers give credit to sellers/suppliers rather than the state's institutions.

Introducing these items in a factorial analysis, we get two latent dimensions which fit well the above mentioned classification. Thus, the first factor can be called „the assessment of consumer's rights protection and observance”, and the second „settlement of conflicts in law courts”. The existence of this second factor is explained through the slow and rather unapproachable character of commercial law in Romania. Only the item regarding the mediation significantly charges in both factors, a fact which rather recommends its exclusion from the analysis. (Table no. 4)

**Table no. 4: The saturation coefficients (obtained through the Varimax rotation method with a Kaiser standardization) corresponding to the variables' main elements analysis regarding the observance of consumer's rights.**

	Component	
	1	2
You feel that you are adequately protected by existing measures to protect consumers	<b>0.85</b>	0.11
You trust public authorities to protect your rights as a consumer	<b>0.84</b>	0.20
In general. sellers\ providers in Romania respect your rights as a consumer	<b>0.83</b>	0.18
You trust the independent consumers' organizations to protect your consumer rights	<b>0.74</b>	0.27
It is easy to resolve disputes with sellers\ providers through an arbitration, mediation or conciliation body (malfunctioning goods. late\ no delivery. etc.)	<b>0.55</b>	0.43
You would be more willing to defend your rights in court if you could join with other consumers who were complaining about the same thing	0.10	<b>0.85</b>
It is easy to resolve disputes with sellers\ providers through the courts	0.28	<b>0.79</b>
EXPLAINED VARIATION (percents)	43.8	24.0

If we take into consideration the variable „*You feel that you are adequately protected by existing measures to protect consumers*” as a dependent variable and try to explain it by means of the three variables regarding the involved parts (sellers/suppliers, public authorities and the independent consumers' organizations) we reach the conclusion that the most significant predictor is the sellers'/suppliers' observance of the rights ( $\beta = 0,43$ ), followed by the trust in the public authorities to observe the consumer's rights ( $\beta = 0,31$ ). (Table no. 5)

**Table no. 5: The size and statistical signification of the independent influence of the predictors of answer to the question „You feel that you are adequately protected by existing measures to protect consumers?” (determination coefficient  $r^2$  is of 0,59)**

	Beta	Sig.
You trust public authorities to protect your rights as a consumer	0.31	0.00
You trust the independent consumers' organizations to protect your consumer rights	0.17	0.00
In general. sellers\ providers in Romania respect your rights as a consumer	0.43	0.00

When we use the sum of the four variables mentioned above like „the assessment of the rights' protection and observance” as a scale (Crombach  $\alpha = 0,86$ ), linearly transformed to adopt values between 0 and 10, we get the following distribution according to the socio-demographic variables. (Table no. 6)

**Table no. 6: The distribution of the „the assessment of the rights' protection and observance" variable according to the socio-demographic categories**

		Mean	Std. error
Gender	Male	4.2	0.1
	Female	4.4	0.1
Age group	15-24	4.3	0.2
	25-39	4.3	0.2
	40-54	4.1	0.2
	55+	4.5	0.2
Education	Up to 15 years	4.3	0.3
	16-19 years	4.2	0.1
	20 years and over	4.5	0.2
	Still studying	4.4	0.2
	No education	7.6	1.1
Residence	Village	4.5	0.1
	Town	4.8	0.2
	City	3.7	0.2

One can notice that the perception of rights' observance is higher with women than with men, with people over 55 years old, with those with a high education level (over 20 years in school) and with people living in a city or town.

All the consumers' categories consider as insufficient the protection they are given and the respect of their rights, the averages being below 5 (the category of those „without education" cannot be taken into account due to the significant error given by the little number of persons in this situation).

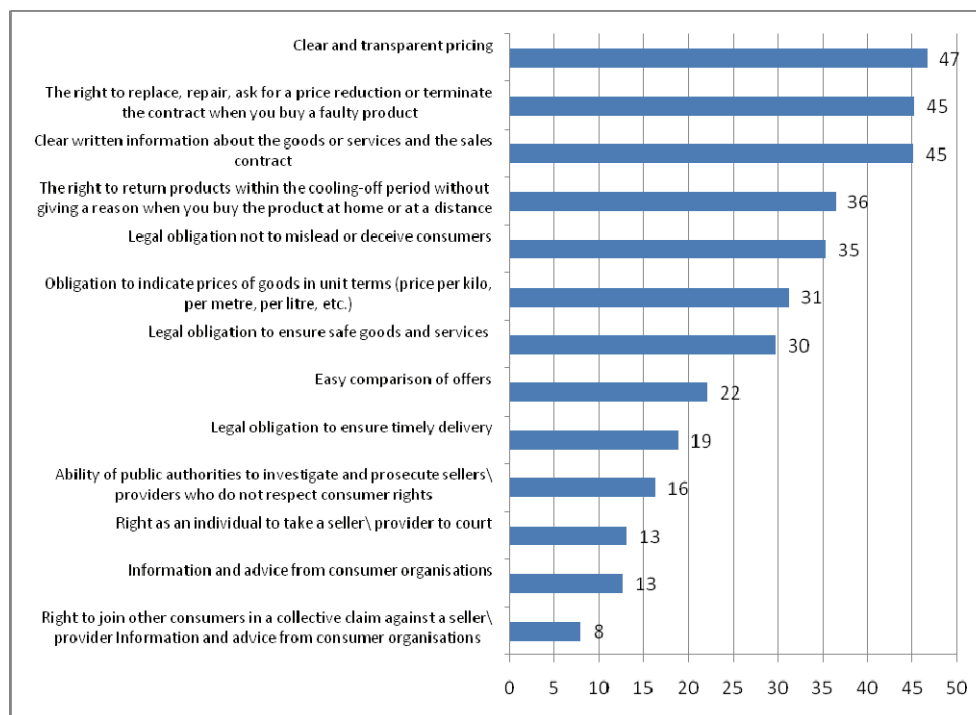
The socio-demographic factors predict though, in a smaller measure the rights' observance perception. Thus, when we introduce all these predictors in the regression model, we get a very weak determination coefficient ( $r^2 = 0.03$ ). Practically, two factors have a significantly negative independent contribution: residence in a city (compared to that in a village) ( $\beta = -0.18$ ) and 16-19 years of education (compared to the group below 15 years) ( $\beta = -0.08$ ).

Thus only living in a city and higher education predict the negative perception of the rights' observance, which on the one hand can be explained through the higher emancipation degree of city-dwellers and through the concentration of consumers in the urban milieu, and on the other hand it necessitates the education of the other citizen categories towards knowing and accessing the consumer's rights, towards manifesting a firm civic attitude when these rights are trespassed.

This conclusion illustrates also the attitude and behaviour differences between social categories which vary under the aspect of instruction level and residence. The demands of those better educated will be greater than those less educated, and the city-dwellers will feel urged to express more frequently their discontent and mistrust regarding this issue, considering that the entitled state's institutions are to be found in cities.

### C. Assessing the best ways to protect consumers

The respondent was asked to make a maximum of 5 choices out of 13 items. The follow-up hierarchy according to the weight of the answers is illustrated in figure no. 2.



**Figure no. 2: The best ways to protect consumers, according to the respondents (percents out of total answers: 5 possible choices)**

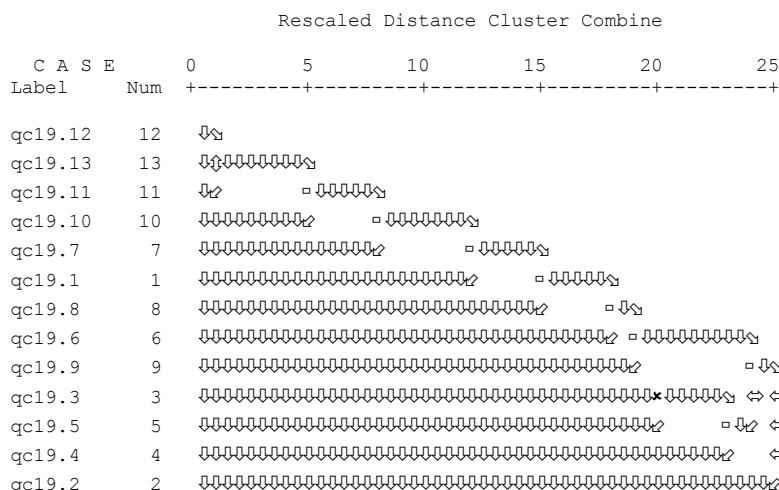
The most frequently cited 4 measures refer to the information and the clear and transparent pricing, as well as to the right to demand the return and the replacement of the products. At the opposite end one can find the coercion means carried out by the state or the pressure carried out by the consumers' associations.

The relationship between the relevant held information and the decision's quality was studied by John V. Petroff in the work „*Comportamentul du consommateur et marketing*”, which shows that „the effectiveness of a taken decision grows with the volume of the relevant information, but on a decreasing rate” according to the decreasing efficiency law (Petroff, 1999, p. 6).

The Romanian consumer is probably found in a less degree under the influence of this law: in the case of most products the information supplied by the producer is insufficient (the European organizations had to intervene for a suitable legislation to be adopted which would oblige the goods and services suppliers to mention the major information for the potential consumers; and they had to intervene especially for the laws' application). Even in the case of information already supplied, consumers assimilate it in a lower degree due to the lack of education in this area.

One can notice that there are three main clusters. The first distinct one includes only the „Clear and transparent pricing” criterion. The next cluster is formed by two subclusters. The first subcluster includes criteria connected to the producer’s obligation to offer clear information about the product, the possibility to return or to replace it. Last but not least, the rest of the variables which are connected to the producer’s and seller’s obligations as well as to the consumers’ and authorities’ possibilities to take recourse to legal proceedings are classified in a second subcluster. (Figure no. 3)

Dendrogram using Average Linkage (Between Groups)



**Figure no. 3: The dendrogram corresponding to the variables' classification representing opinions about the best ways to protect the consumer**

*Legend: 1-Easy comparison of offers, 2-Clear and transparent pricing, 3- Clear written information about the goods or services and the sales contract, 4- The right to replace, repair, ask for a price reduction or terminate the contract when you buy a faulty product, 5- The right to return products within the cooling-off period without giving a reason when you buy the product at home or at a distance, 6- Obligation to indicate prices of goods in unit terms (price per kilo, per metre, per litre, etc.), 7- Legal obligation to ensure timely delivery, 8- Legal obligation to ensure safe goods and services , 9- Legal obligation not to mislead or deceive consumers, 10- Ability of public authorities to investigate and prosecute sellers\ providers who do not respect consumer rights, 11- Right as an individual to take a seller\ provider to court, 12- Right to join other consumers in a collective claim against a seller\ provider Information and advice from consumer organisations, 13- Information and advice from consumer organizations.*

This classification reinforces the centrality of the consumer-seller relation or that of the supplier which exists in the Romanian consumer's representation. The possible action of the state or of the consumers' organizations is either less known or the Romanian consumer does not trust it.

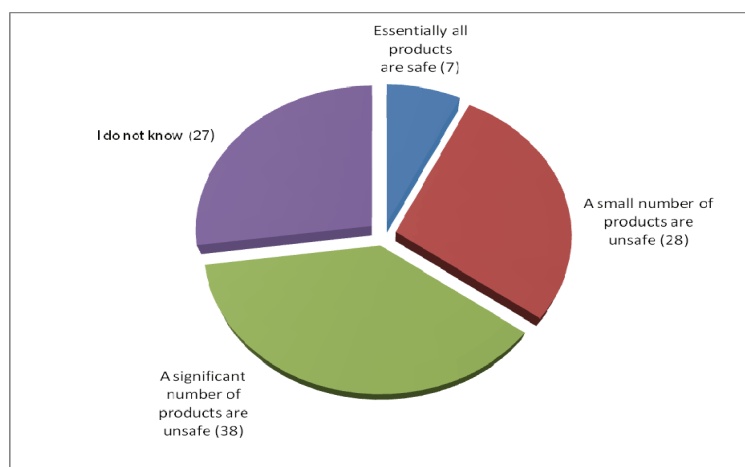
*D. The marketed non-food products safety assessment*

The safety/lack of safety of non-food products can be measured by means of the number of accidents appeared during their usage resulting in injuries, casualties. The way in which the consumers appreciate products' safety is extremely important for the consumption behaviour, therefore for the producers/sellers. A study carried out in the U.S.A. reveals radical changes in consumption behaviour in the case where it was determined that products are not safe or have a low quality (this aspect could often be the cause for the lack of safety). Thus 58% of those who encountered such problems restrained themselves from buying those products for an average of nine months. Moreover, due to this long boycott period, it is possible for them to give up for good those products as well as other products of the same brand, which causes very important damages to the producers. (Anon, 2006b).

Due to this reason the producers are getting more and more interested in testing the safety of the products before commercializing them, in preventing the utilization risks, awarding warranties for the possible malfunctions appeared shortly after the purchase, accepting the return of the products or the victims' compensation, as well as withdrawing products from the market if a batch of products is proven to be flawed.

The need for non-food products' safety is reflected in the consumers' desire to have access to as much and clear information as possible regarding the purchased products, be it information written of the package or on the producers' internet sites or on the consumers' internet forums; the latter being independent seem to be more credible.

As it can be noticed in figure no. 4, Romanian consumers are not too confident regarding the safety of the marketed products. As expected, the products' safety perception is linked to the perception of consumers' rights observance. Those who consider that all the products or at least a great number of them are safe consider that their rights are also observed.



**Figure no. 4: The assessment of non-food marketed products safety (percents)**

The increase of consumers' trust regarding the safety of the products and implicitly the prevention of risks in their usage demands their appropriate labelling. That means readable, understandable, essential information, clear warnings regarding potential threats (especially

for children). At the same time, it means encouraging the buyer to read the labels and to put to use the information they carry. It is also expected that the state get involved in guaranteeing the safety of goods and services by drawing up a suitable legislation and by means of strict controls regarding products' safety. (Table no. 7)

**Table no. 7: The average levels of the summative variable „rights' observance” and of the answer to the question „Do you chose non-food products according to safety?” regarding the assessment of non-food currently marketed products' safety**

	Rights' observance (1-10)		Non-food products choice according to their safety (0-1)	
	Average	Standard error	Average	Standard error
Generally, all products are safe	5.8	0.4	0.46	0.06
A small number of products are not safe	4.6	0.2	0.57	0.03
An important number of products are not safe	3.8	0.1	0.56	0.03
It varies according to the product	4.1	0.2	0.34	0.04
I do not know	4.6	0.4	0.30	0.04

In the European Union the problem of products' safety is more urgent in the context in which they move freely on the common market, regardless of their origin, a fact that increases the European consumer's mistrust. Nevertheless, a study carried out in 1997 (European Commission, 1997) in EU 15 traced a significant trust (of over 80%) of the European consumers in home appliances, hotels, cars and restaurants and a lower trust (60-70%) in beauty products, sport events and food products. From this point of view, the admission of Romania into the EU comes with further risks and responsibilities, both for the consumers and for the producers.

### Conclusions

Using the data provided by the special EB 69.1 Romania Eurobarometer on the issue of „Consumer's Protection on the Domestic Market”, we have attempted to identify the factors that influence the buying decision, to evaluate the protection level felt by the consumer, as well as its attitude regarding the most efficient methods of consumer protection in Romania as they are felt by the consumers themselves.

Secondary analysis, performed using SPSS software, has shown that more than two thirds of the Romanian consumers take their purchasing decision using as a main criterion the price, a fact that can be explained by the low income level, but also by the consumer's low level of instruction regarding the large quantity and diversity of products on the market.

Generally, the Romanian consumer displays discontent regarding the way its rights are protected by the consumers' associations, by the authorities or by the legislation. Since both the consumers' protection institutions and the competent laws are relatively little known and used by the Romanian consumer, especially the one living in the countryside, a high discontent level regarding the issue is not a surprise.

From our point of view, we are facing a vicious circle in which the producers take advantage of the consumers' lack of information and attitude regarding their rights; and the consumers, lacking an appropriate instruction remain only at a discontent level, not trusting the possibility of their rights' observance, which in turn determines a low level of self-protection. The real change should come from a sustained consumers' education, but also from that of the producers regarding the quality, the safety of the marketed products, from the attitude towards the producers'/sellers' disobedience for the rules in this filed, all doubled by the authorities' increased interest for the consumers' protection and a display of individual or associative civic spirit.

## References

- Boier, R., 1994. *Comportamentul consumatorului*. Iași: Editura Graphix.
- Bourgoin, V., 2008. *L'histoire de la protection du consommateur* [Online] Available at: <http://www.village-justice.com/articles/histoire-protection-consommateur,4506.html>, [Accessed 23 October 2009]
- Dinu, V., 2001. *Protecția drepturilor și intereselor consumatorilor*. Buzău: Editura Alpha.
- Dinu, V., 2006. Dimensiunea europeană a politicii de protecție a consumatorilor. *Amfiteatru economic*, VIII(20), pp. 93-101.
- Dubois, P.L. & Jolibert, A., 1994. *Marketing teorie și practică*. Volum II. Cluj-Napoca: Universitatea de Științe Agricole.
- Dubois, P.L. & Jolibert, A., 1992. *Marketing teorie și practică*. Volum I. Cluj-Napoca: Universitatea de Științe Agricole.
- European Commission, 2009. *L'Europe des consommateurs: Les citoyens face à la qualité des produits alimentaires* [Online] Available at: [http://ec.europa.eu/public\\_opinion/archives/ebs/ebs\\_110\\_alim\\_fr.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/public_opinion/archives/ebs/ebs_110_alim_fr.pdf), [Accessed 30 September 2009]
- European Commission, 2008. *Eurobarometer 69.1: Discrimination, Radioactive Waste, and Purchasing in the European Union, February-March 2008*. Cologne, Germany: TNS Opinion & Social (original integrated data set and documentation), GESIS - Leibniz Institute for the Social Sciences (archive release data set and DDI documentation) [Online] Available at: <http://zacat.gesis.org/> (by request) [Accessed 30 September 2009]
- Ferrier, D., 1997. *La protection des consommateurs*. Paris: Editions Dalloz-Sirey.
- Filip, F.G. & Simionescu, B.C., 2004. *Fenomene și procese cu risc major la scară națională*. București: Editura Academiei Române.
- Glickman, L.B., 2009. *Buying power: a history of consumer activism in America*. Chicago: London, University of Chicago Press, [Online] Available at: <http://www.anpepps.ro/publicatii.php?lang=ro&publicatieid=2>, [Accessed 30 September 2009]
- Joule, R.V. & Beauvois, J.L., 1997. *Tratat de manipulare*. București: Editura Antet.
- Kiecolt, K. J. & Nathan, L. E., 1985. *Secondary analysis of survey data*. Beverly Hills: Sage Publications.
- Kotler, P., Saunders, J., Armstrong, G. & Wong, V., 2003. *Principiile marketingului*. București: Editura Teora.



- Mierlea S. et al., 2006. *Protecția consumatorilor și concurența pe piață din perspectiva societății civile*, [Online] Available at: <http://www.anpcpps.ro/publicatii.php?lang=ro&publicatieid=2>, [Accessed 3 November 2009]
- Moussis, N., 2008. *Accès à l'Union européenne: droit, économie, politiques*. 13e édition révisée. Bruxelles: European Study Service.
- Petrof, J.V., 1993. *Comportement du consommateur et marketing*. Quebec: Presses Université Laval.
- Pride, M.W. & Ferell, O.C., 1991. *Marketing - Concepts and Strategies*. 7<sup>th</sup> ed. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company.
- Ueno, Y.U., Olczak, M. & Takahashi, Y., 2009. *Promoting consumer education: trends, policies, and good practices*. Paris: OECD.
- Winn, J.K. ed., 2006. *Consumer protection in the age of the 'information economy'*. Aldershot, Hants, England ; Burlington, VT: Ashgate.
- \*\*\*1985. Rezoluția ONU nr. 39/248/1985 "Principiile directoare privind protecția consumatorilor".
- \*\*\*1992. Ordonanța de Urgență a Guvernului nr. 21/1992 privind protecția consumatorilor, republicată, modificată și completată.
- \*\*\*2004. Legea nr.296/2004 privind Codul consumului.
- Anon, 2008. Supliment revista InfoCons ian.2008, în Revista InfoCons, nr.1, februarie, [Online] Available at: <http://www.anpcpps.ro/publicatii.php?lang=ro&publicatieid=5>, [Accessed 23 October 2009]
- Anon, 2006a. Préserver la sécurité des consommateurs européens: Rapport Annuel 2006 sur l'utilisation du système d'alerte rapide pour les produits de consommation non-alimentaires RAPEX. Luxembourg: EUR-OP, 2007.
- Anon, 2006b. L'observatoire des crises alimentaires : Comment les Français réagissent face aux crises, [Online] Available at: <http://www.opinion-way.com/pdf/resultats-barometre-crisis-alimentaires5.pdf>, [Accessed 23 September 2009]